



Councilman Peter Hill and Assistant City Manager Rob Braulik on the corner of Rocklin and Pacific, the site of Rocklin's first streetlights.

Redeveloping Rocklin



WITH PRECONSTRUCTION
HEADACHES ELIMINATED,
A MIXED-USE
DOWNTOWN IS ON ITS WAY

by Roger S. Peterson

Rocklin wants a new downtown. If officials succeed, a unique mixed-use environment will rise from 260 acres near Interstate 80. Lucky circumstances make it much easier for prospective developers, so opportunities await — but only for creative developers and retailers.

When fires destroyed Rocklin's first downtown in the 1890s, businesses migrated to the nearby intersection of Rocklin Road and Pacific Street (or Taylor Road, depending on which way you turn).

Pacific and Taylor eventually hosted the legendary Lincoln Highway, America's first cross-continental roadway,

PHOTO BY BILL MAHON; INSET PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCKLIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

which became U.S. 40. Highway 40 carried Bay Area and Sacramento traffic to Lake Tahoe. Locals recall Sunday traffic backed up so much that it was difficult to cross the street. But the completion of I-80 in 1964 largely killed off Rocklin's second downtown. At the time, the population was 6,000.

Located in the middle of the proposed downtown renovation, the Granite Rock Grille and nearby Rosie's have made Pacific Street popular among folks who crave a hearty breakfast. On Sundays, the Grille cracks 2,200

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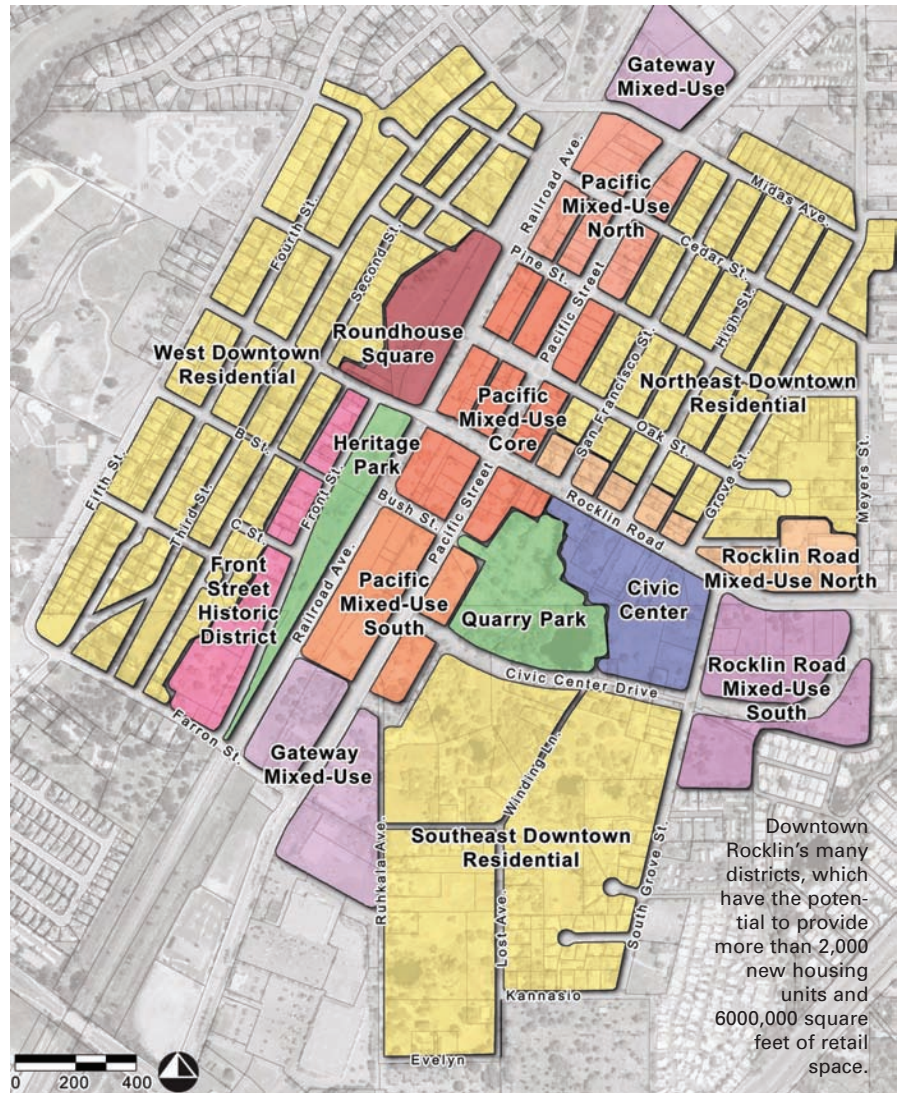
—Jerry Mitchell, chair, Rocklin Redevelopment Advisory Committee

eggs for scores of tasty dishes served by veteran waitresses not too proud to call every guy “Honey” or “Sweetheart.” It’s just the kind of business Rocklin’s visionaries see for a new Pacific Street.

“I think the renovation will be wonderful. I hope all the businesses can survive, but not all will,” says Grille owner Kay Gardner, citing the auto-aftermarket shops that don’t fit the plan. After the Rocklin Redevelopment Agency unveiled the plan, she and her husband chose not to buy their building because it’s in the path of the renovation.

“Right now, Stanford Ranch residents have few reasons to come down here,” says Rocklin City Manager Carlos Urrutia, “so we want to create a gathering place for people to make the Rocklin community whole.”

The downtown redevelopment reflects the Preferred Blueprint Scenario for 2050 jointly sponsored by the Sacra-



mento Area Council of Governments and Valley Vision. The Blueprint envisions “compact, mixed-use development and more transit choices as an alternative to low density development” as the region’s population grows from two million to more than 3.8 million people.

Rocklin’s population, now 51,000, is quickly reaching what Urrutia calls its “residential maturity” of 65,000 to 70,000 people. Roseville is projected to reach a population of 200,000 and Lincoln could reach 150,000 in 10 to 15 years.

What’s significant, Urrutia says, is that Rocklin will build on the Blueprint vision faster than other growing cities will. Much of the requisite infrastructure

is in place. Fewer obstacles to development need tackling. No historic structures or environmentally sensitive sites are affected. Newly widened streets, sewers and sidewalks already exist. Rocklin Mayor George Magnuson adds that the city already owns all vacant lots throughout the project.

For developers, Rocklin’s added value is substantial: Most preconstruction headaches are eliminated.

Construction began in October on a new train station, located near Pacific to serve Sacramento-bound Amtrak commuters. “Residents can live in the new downtown Rocklin, walk to the train station three blocks away, and commute to

Sacramento without ever going on the freeway,” says Councilman Peter Hill.

The Rocklin Road exit from I-80 is a mile away, where a new “Welcome to Rocklin” entrance has been added.

Because mixed-use includes residential, safety is another winner for Rocklin. It has the lowest crime rate of any Sacramento-area city.

Rocklin officials cite several examples of existing downtown renovations. Walnut Creek’s downtown was redone in the last 20 years to maximize the commuter opportunities Bay Area Rapid Transit affords. Hill likes how Redwood City and San Carlos have renovated their downtowns. Santa Clara’s Rivermark project is also mentioned.

But the most frequently cited example is San Jose’s Santana Row. (The style of its buildings — though not its scale — is what appeals to Rocklin officials.)

Santana Row’s Web site describes the project, which has 66 stores and 18 restaurants, as “a vibrant community of luxurious apartments, distinctive condominiums, exciting shops, pampering spas, and a full-service hotel ... Our pedestrian-friendly streets have a European flair, complete with fountains, a farmers’ market, and concerts and other special events in the open air.” Santana Row’s reality is Rocklin’s dream.

Rocklin citizens saw the dream unfold electronically last May. The city retained RBF Consulting for what RBF Project Manager Jason Jones called a community-image survey. Jones flashed 125 slides of other downtown developments while audience members ranked them on Scantrons.

Warren L. Jorgensen, a private citizen active in the planning, says public sentiment is to tie Rocklin’s history to the new downtown. The public won’t be disappointed. Across from the train station and tracks are the proposed Front Street Historic District, Heritage Park and Roundhouse Square, the site of Rocklin’s railway past.

An expanded Johnson-Springview Park, which will have a nature trail in the future, is a 15-minute walk past many restored Victorian houses. A much-needed larger library is also planned for the expanded civic center.

Developers are already working on 25 of the 260 acres, but Rocklin officials have turned down some proposals. Urrutia dismissed one proposal as



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despite the recent wine craze, there is only one commercial vineyard in Loomis? The owners of Secret Ravine Winery (secretravine.com) began growing grapes back in 1998. This year they are bottling 2,000 cases of estate-grown Zinfandel, Syrah and Rosato de Sangiovese. The property was used as a vineyard from the late 1800s to the 1950s, when it was transformed into a dairy farm.

another “sea of parking spaces.” Non-creative developers need not apply.

Rocklin’s plan calls for three- to four-story buildings on the Rocklin Road-Pacific Street intersection, with two- to three-story buildings further down. First floors will be specialty shops, restaurants, cafés, art galleries and stylish watering holes. Second floors might be commercial offices. Top floors would be apartments and condominiums.

“We shouldn’t force the plan, because we want to attract the right investors and businesses.”

— Councilman Peter Hill, chairperson, Downtown Rocklin Plan Committee

Officials prefer designs that recess each story so that the upper-floor residents can look down on Pacific from cozy terraces. “It’s an exciting opportunity to have a great place for a business and live in the same building,” says Assistant City Manager Rob Braulik, point man on the whole project.

“We want to attract people but also serve the people who will live in this mixed-use environment,” says Jerry Mitchell, a resident who chairs the city’s Redevelopment Advisory Committee. “We seek to create some real energy in what has otherwise been a bedroom community,” he adds.

Rocklin’s biggest claim to future fame, however, may rise from deep inside the huge abandoned granite mine located behind the Rocklin Civic Center. Planners gaze into the hole and imagine something very special: a 3,000-seat amphitheater, prompting some to wonder if Rocklin could give Ashland a run

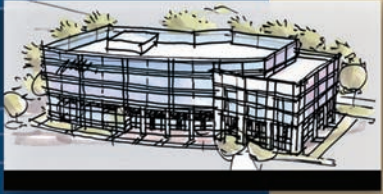


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for its thespian dollars with "Shakespeare in the Quarry."

Audiences could walk from the proposed Quarry Park directly to the restaurants and lounges planners hope will line Pacific. But Magnuson admits an amphitheater needs further study to avoid noise complaints.

Some businesses — gas stations, auto parts stores, industrial warehouses

— won't fit the profile. Others, such as a tattoo parlor and a palm reader, will be priced out by higher rents, which is one of the reasons redevelopment funds are important to prevent blight.

Rocklin taxpayers will not be assessed for any costs. The Redevelopment Agency has paid for all costs to date, getting funds from upgrades to existing properties.

The city has not yet used eminent domain for the project, chiefly because the Redevelopment Agency has been purchasing vacant property. Several existing older residences are safe because the agency voted 10 years ago not to take occupied residences. But those owners may choose to cash in on increased property values and relocate.

As with any project this size, some obstacles remain. "We may run into some wetland issues," says Hill, who chairs the Downtown Plan Committee. Once the final downtown plan is finished in the spring, that issue will be faced, as will a final study of water, sewer and drainage, and traffic patterns. The revised general plan, including the downtown plan, goes to the City Council in June.

One uncertainty remains — does a market exist? If Rocklin and developers build it, will businesses and people come to it? "In the end, it's all about getting an investor or developer to write a check," says Hill. Mitchell believes that patience is essential. "We shouldn't force the plan, because we want to attract the right investors and businesses."

If you want to know how something will fly in Rocklin, ask Roy. Roy Ruhkala and his extended family have lived in Rocklin all their lives. His granite-monument business is one of the oldest continuously running operations in Placer County.

A practical man who is quick to say that pouring concrete is a long way off, Ruhkala nonetheless is optimistic the plan will give his neighborhood its third downtown. Or, as Jerry Mitchell says, "We want something that will make a 'there' there." ©

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Did you know...

attached residential development is booming in Rocklin? The city recently approved major new condo and townhome projects. A 93-unit condominium project called Hearthstone will feature 12 three-story buildings, and a 132-unit townhome project called Rocklin Ridge Townhomes will consist of 28 separate buildings. Both will have garages, pools and other amenities.